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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda
Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional level
Trends in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, including the review of the report of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and its recommendations to the Conference of the Parties

Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional level

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Decision 3/COP.11 requested the main stakeholders involved in the regional implementation of the Convention, particularly country Parties, Regional Coordination Mechanisms and Convention institutions, to take a wide range of actions according to their respective roles.

The current document reports on the status of implementation of decision 3/COP.11, as requested by the Conference of the Parties (COP), according to the main topics addressed in the decision: (a) institutional framework; (b) regional cooperation; and (c) regional implementation.

The COP may consider reviewing and taking note of this report.

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I. Introduction and background information

1. Decision 3/COP.11 requested the main stakeholders involved in the regional implementation of the Convention, particularly country Parties, Regional Coordination Mechanisms (RCMs) and Convention institutions, to take a wide range of actions according to their respective roles.

2. Affected country Parties were requested to: (i) review the mandates of the RCMs and their respective work programmes according to regional priorities; (ii) foster the subregional action programmes (SRAPs) and regional action programmes (RAPs), ensuring their links with national action programmes; (iii) promote regional cooperation, including with the civil society and scientific institutions; (iv) establish a Regional Committee (RC); and (vii) support the RCMs, including by hosting the Regional Coordination Units (RCUs) where required.

3. The RCUs were tasked with: (i) strengthening cooperation and partnerships with relevant regional stakeholders, including civil society organizations and the private sector; and (ii) working with the RCs to ensure technical support for implementation activities at national, subregional and regional levels. In turn, the RCs were encouraged to play a more active role in supporting and strengthening the RCMs through a number of specific actions.

4. The secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) were requested to: (i) clarify their respective roles and responsibilities with regard to the RCUs; (ii) complete the recruitment of RCU staff where indicated; and (iii) promote and facilitate regional coordination, including the integration of relevant entities in regional activities.

5. This document contains a report on the status of implementation of decision 3/COP.11, as requested by the Conference of the Parties (COP), according to the main topics addressed in the decision: (a) institutional framework; (b) regional cooperation; and (c) regional implementation.

II. Strengthening the institutional framework

A. Regional Coordination Units

6. Since the formal establishment of the Regional Coordination Mechanisms (RCUs, RCs and thematic programme networks (TPNs)) by decision 3/COP.9, the secretariat and the GM have been providing support to the RCUs by appointing human resources from the core budget and allocating voluntary contributions to service the five Regional Implementation Annexes. They have also ensured the development and implementation of work programmes to support the implementation activities in the different regions.

7. The work programmes of the RCUs are derived from the Convention work programme adopted by the COP. Their main objectives remain the facilitation of regional coordination and the implementation of specific actions at the national, subregional and regional levels.

8. In the current biennium, the activities of the RCU include, inter alia, support to the regional groups and the RCs; awareness-raising; provision of outputs to subregional and regional processes; training and technical support to the reporting exercise and the alignment of action programmes; facilitation of regional meetings preparatory to the thirteenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 13) and the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12); and the provision of information and feedback to national focal points (NFPs) on matters

relating to the implementation of the Convention. The GM has focused its efforts on two core areas, namely the provision of inputs to subregional and regional processes and technical support to the reporting exercise through the 'Global Support Programme', which is being implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme.

9. The programme delivery of the RCUs relied to a great extent on the available human and financial resources, which implied a very tight prioritization of activities. With one staff member on average, servicing regional processes has often been challenging. When additional support was provided, for instance through the regional consultants deployed by the Global Support Programme, the outreach capacity and the outputs increased considerably.

1. Africa

10. For the current biennium, the Africa RCU relied on only one staff member, as no voluntary contributions were made available for additional staff. In addition, after consultation with the Africa Group, and as there were no countries in the region in a position to host the RCU, the regional officer moved to the headquarters of the secretariat in Bonn, Germany. The matter was addressed at the last African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and it is expected that some possible solutions will be considered soon.

2. Asia

11. The Asia RCU is based in Bangkok and hosted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), which provides office space, facilities and logistics services on a cost-recovery basis. Two officers are based in the Asia RCU, one under the core budget and a second one thanks to a contribution from the Republic of Korea.

3. Latin America and Caribbean

12. The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) RCU has been located in Santiago de Chile since 2012, under a host agreement with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Since 2013, the LAC RCU has been operating with one staff member under the core budget.

4. Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern Europe

13. One officer, based in Bonn, is servicing the two Regional Implementation Annexes. Following the offer of the Government of Turkey to establish an RCU for Regional Implementation Annex IV in Turkey, the secretariat has been facilitating the process, and a draft host country agreement is presently under consideration by the Government. In addition, further to consultations held in the margins of CRIC 13, arrangements for the joint hosting of both RCUs for Regional Implementation Annexes IV and V in the same premises are being discussed, and it is expected that a final decision be taken prior to or at COP 12.

B. Regional Committees

14. RCs have been established for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), while the other Regional Implementation Annexes have not planned to establish such committees. The status of the RCs, their role and the impacts they have on the decision-making process vary from region to region. Still, the RCs are only

recognized in the Convention process and have not yet defined their operating modalities and procedures.

1. Latin America and Caribbean

15. The LAC Regional Executive Committee has a political function, discharged mainly in conducting consultations and providing guidance to the regional representatives, including the Bureau of the COP.

2. Northern Mediterranean

16. The coordination of Northern Mediterranean countries' efforts is ensured by the regional chairs, who are regularly appointed by the Parties of the Regional Implementation Annex. With the possible establishment of a RCU for Regional Implementation Annex IV, it is expected that regional coordination will be reinforced.

3. Central and Eastern Europe

17. In CEE, the RC was established in early 2015 and the secretariat was formally notified of its statute. The RC consists of the regional representatives of the Bureaux of the COP, the CRIC and the Committee on Science and Technology and one representative from the civil society as an observer. The RC works primarily through informal communications with the purpose of formulating positions and statements for the sessions of the governing bodies and the meetings of their Bureaux. The RC, assisted by the regional officer of the secretariat, is currently steering the preparation of the Regional Action Programme for Regional Implementation Annex V.

III. Promoting regional cooperation

A. Establishing partnerships at the subregional and regional levels

1. Africa

18. Some of the main regional processes in which relevant partners and stakeholders are involved include AMCEN, the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI), the New Partnership for Africa's Development/TerrAfrica process, and the intended nationally determined contributions process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The GM is implementing a European Commission-funded project called Front Local Environnemental pour une Union VertE as a direct contribution to GGWSSI and the Italy-funded project 'West Africa: Promoting Sustainable Land Management in Migration-prone Areas through Innovative Financing Mechanisms'.

2. Asia

19. In Asia, a number of public-private partnerships and capacity-building, academic exchange and technical cooperation initiatives have taken place at various levels and through bilateral and multilateral agreements; there have also been initiatives launched in liaison with country Parties and regional offices of United Nations agencies.

3. Latin America and Caribbean

20. Partnerships have been developed with the International Organization for Migration, resulting in the organization of a workshop on desertification, migration and climate change in October 2014 in Santiago de Chile and other regional processes, such as Initiative 20x20.

4. Central and Eastern Europe

21. For Regional Implementation Annex V, the partnership with the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) has been evolving over the current biennium. This has occurred through the organization of a number of activities, including on training, communication and awareness-raising in the region through the REC network. Collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has also started, with the view of including the consideration of the CEE RAP in ECE deliberations. In the current biennium, the collaboration with the Drought Management Centre for Southeastern Europe (DMCSEE) focused on capacity-building support for developing national drought management policies, participation in the DMCSEE events and the contribution of DMCSEE materials to a media workshop for environmental journalists.

5. Civil society

22. During the current biennium, the Civil Society Organization Panel (CSO Panel) has been particularly active in supporting subregional and regional-level processes. On the one hand, the regional representatives have collected the input and feedback of their constituencies to provide contributions to the finalization of the business engagement strategy, the Science-Policy Interface and the intergovernmental working group established by decision 8/COP.11. On the other hand, they have been able to share information and inputs with their regional constituencies.

23. Of all of the regions, African CSOs have been particularly active, especially due to the financial resources provided by the Global Environmental Facility for the implementation of the project 'Improving Sustainable Land Management and UNCCD Policy and Practice Interaction in Sub-Sahara Africa through Civil Society Capacity Building'. The project, being implemented jointly by *Environnement Développement Action dans le Tiers Monde* , the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa and the United Nations Development Programme, has been key in the establishment of a strong network of civil society organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa.

B. Regional consultations

24. The meetings of the Regional Implementation Annexes in the preparation for CRIC 13 were organized immediately prior to that session (March 2015 in Bonn). African countries have planned to convene a meeting in preparation for COP 12 at the beginning of September in South Africa. The Government of Turkey has offered to host the meetings of Northern Mediterranean and CEE countries prior to COP 12 in Ankara. No other regional meetings have been scheduled in preparation for COP 12.

IV. Facilitating regional implementation

A. Subregional and regional action programmes

25. Decision 3/COP.11 requests affected country Parties to review existing subregional and regional action programmes and to ensure that they reflect regional priorities and proposed synergies. The alignment process at subregional and regional levels has not benefited from funding from the GEF's enabling activities, which is evidently influencing its speed and outcomes.

1. Africa

26. African NFPs participated in a training workshop on subregional and regional action programmes alignment in Addis Ababa. So far in Africa, SRAP alignment has been achieved for three subregions (Central Africa, North Africa and West Africa). The alignment process for Southern Africa has been launched with support from the International Union for Conservation of Nature. In 2014, the Summit of the African Union took a decision on strengthening the implementation of the UNCCD, under which RAP alignment was addressed.

2. Asia

27. In the period under review, alignment workshops were organized in the Islamic Republic of Iran (for the Asia region) and in Bonn, Germany (for the Pacific subregion). For Central Asia, the subregional priorities were revised during the consultations for phase II of the Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management (CACILM II) and reflected in the final project document, which was approved by the GEF Council in May 2015. The subregional programme will be implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Subregional Office for Central Asia with co-financing from the FAO, Central Asian governments, the Government of Turkey and other regional institutions.

3. Latin America and Caribbean

28. The RAP adopted following the ninth regional meeting of the Latin American and the Caribbean country Parties (Bogota, 2003) has never entered into actual implementation. LAC countries claim that the responsibility for the implementation and fundraising for the RAP lies with the Convention institutions. The only SRAP still functioning is the Partnership Initiative on Sustainable Land Management (PISLM), which has been receiving some support from the GM and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. PISLM has organized a workshop in May 2014 in Trinidad and Tobago aimed at refining the work programme and aligning it with the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy). However, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has already communicated to the coordinating institution (Caribbean Network for Integrated Rural Development) that no further support could be provided from 2016.

4. Central and Eastern Europe

29. Following the request of the Regional Implementation Annex V country Parties, the secretariat provided financial and methodological support for the development of the RAP. A RAP Task Force was established, composed of the NFPs, the science and technology correspondents and civil society representatives, with a balanced representation from all Parties in the region. The RC has been steering the RAP process since the beginning of 2015. Currently, the regional programme is providing an overview of the regional priorities and is addressing the need for building regional partnerships. The next step will be to identify the regional institution(s) who will take the lead in resource mobilization and the implementation of the relevant activities emanating from the RAP priorities.

30. The role of the GEF in supporting the regional and subregional activities has been key: six regional and eight global projects in the Land Degradation Focal Area were financed under the fifth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund. In programming their subregional and regional activities, the GEF should take into account the subregional and regional priorities, which are reflected in the aligned action programmes of the affected country Parties.

B. Subregional and regional reporting

31. The secretariat and the GM provided technical assistance and backstopping to the subregional and regional reporting entities, while no financial support could be extended due to limited financial resources. In 2014, 3 subregional reports were submitted, which is a sharp decline in comparison to the previous reporting exercise when 14 subregional reports and 1 regional report were submitted.

32. While working on their reports, all subregional reporting entities relied on the satisfactory coordination with the relevant countries in their constituency.

C. New initiatives to foster regional implementation

33. The GM is engaging in a number of relevant global initiatives and partnerships aiming at fostering the implementation of the Convention in order to address land degradation issues and promote land degradation neutrality. Such initiatives include the International Land Coalition, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration, the FAO Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism, the Forest Ecosystem Restoration Initiative, the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature Initiative and the International Year of Soils. These initiatives provide opportunities for: (i) fostering new collaborations with relevant partners for UNCCD implementation at the subregional and regional levels; (ii) mainstreaming sustainable land management (SLM) in policy processes; and (iii) advocating for increased access to SLM finance.

34. In terms of partnership and cooperation, the secretariat and GM facilitated some North–South and South–South cooperation through initiatives and/or projects such as the Changwon Initiative and the Kubuqi International Desert Forum. The secretariat and its Asia RCU were actively involved in the organization and sponsorship of the 4th Kubuqi International Desert Forum, which took place on 1–3 August 2013 in Ordos City in Inner Mongolia, China. The 5th Kubuqi International Desert Forum will be held on 28–29 July 2015 in Inner Mongolia, China, and the secretariat and its Asia RCU will be actively involved in both the organizational work and the communication strategy. The Kubuqi International Desert Forum became an international platform for government officers, scientists, academics and technicians from countries of all Regional Implementation Annexes to expand their exchange of expertise and technical networking relating to the mitigation of desertification/land degradation and drought, sand dune stabilization, and afforestation in affected regions.

35. The Greening Drylands Partnership of the Changwon Initiative has gained momentum in the current biennium. It aims to support action programmes toward addressing desertification/land degradation and mitigating the effects of drought; reforestation through tree planting and forest rehabilitation in degraded lands; the implementation of the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification; and the integration of green growth opportunities in national policy measures and in the NAPs aligned with The Strategy. The secretariat and the respective RCUs helped establish cooperation, supporting targeted countries in the preparation of the relevant documents to allow them access to the funds provided under the Changwon Initiative.

36. The secretariat and respective RCUs helped to develop the research project 'ELD in Central Asia: a Regional Assessment of the Economics of Land Degradation', which is supported and facilitated by the Secretariat of the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, the CGIAR

Program Facilitation Unit for Central Asia and Caucasus. It is being jointly implemented by national research and academic institutions in Central Asia, together with the Center for Development Research at the University of Bonn. The project receives full support and endorsement from the governments of the Central Asian countries. With the overall goal of transforming national and regional land use, the regional ELD assessment will provide knowledge and a sound information basis to policymakers. It aims at economically valuing present land-use strategies as well as feasible alternatives in order to increase economically and ecologically sustainable practices that are in line with national development goals related to land.

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